

THE TASK FOR PRIVATE CHARITY

Private charity has three characteristics that provide distinctive opportunities because each is a source of peculiar strength.

While your attention is perhaps at its maximum and your emotions neither chilled nor blunted by less important things, let me make clear the three peculiar strengths of private philanthropy. If you can use nothing else from this talk, if you remember nothing else from this half hour, let it be the three things that give private institutions their special importance. To help you remember these three things that private organizations do better than those that are maintained by government, the initials are S. E. C.

S. stands for Starting. A private charity can start pretty much what it wants to start, and when it wants to start it. The timing is often as important as anything else. Government usually waits until the need has accumulated to such overwhelming dimensions that there are not anywhere near enough trained and competent persons to deal with the situation. Government is likely to forget that planning is important. It is in a hurry for action. But a private organization can make deliberate plans in advance and train the doctors or the nurses or the social workers or any other needed workers adequately to meet the demand before the task has become too great. This freedom to start anything is something precious and peculiar to private charity, and it is the first of your three peculiar strengths.

E. stands for Experimenting. Or, if pioneer blood still runs in your arteries, you might call it exploring. In any human undertaking

mere magnitude of operations discourages and even prevents experimenting. What if you cannot equal the volage of a government welfare service? You can experiment and both observe and demonstrate the facts shown by the experiment. As we all know, experimenting may seem almost a confession of failure to a large operating agency. This easy opportunity to experiment is the envy of all big organizations. They envy private charity in this, the second of your characteristic strengths.

C. stands for Changing. Or call it adaptation or adjustment. The private agency can change its direction more easily than the governmental gyroscope. For this very reason the private charity can wisely insist on playing its long suit by being deliberately sensitive to a changing environment. And what environments have not changed in the past decade or two? I trust that it will excite no suspicion and ruffle no tempers if I say that it is one of the advantages of private enterprises that they can even die more gracefully and promptly than governmental agencies. Any first-rate professional man tries to diminish the need for his services. Is this not a reasonable hope for private charity? In fairness to governmental agencies I should add that the last time I was in Washington I heard rumors of a new piece of legislation to be introduced in Congress that provides that government officials may not hold office after they are dead. The people in Washington weren't born there. They have a sense of humor too. It is not the individual officials in government that give me pause, it is the difficulty that government agencies as such experience in stopping when the need for their work has ceased. (Nor do private agencies always admit the sweet

reasonableness of ceasing to exist.) Bigness is not greatness. And bigness usually lives on beyond its time because it cannot easily change. Witness the dinosaur.

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These then are your long suits: the abilities to start new work, to experiment, and to change. And it is the part of valor no less than of intelligence to use these strengths to the limit. It takes courage to experiment when it would be so easy to expand, and it takes courage to change from routine to alert uncertainty.

Now are you alone in recognizing that these are the peculiar resources of private organizations. When I talk with men and women in government service they express their envy of you for these characteristic advantages for they cannot so easily initiate, explore and adjust.

These freedoms to begin, to experiment and to change, are far more important in the world today than they were a hundred years ago or backward over any of the preceding centuries. They are more important because, as Elton Mayo has observed, we no longer live in a traditional civilization but in an adaptive civilization. Witness the adaptations we are still in the course of making to the automobile, the airplane, the radio. And even these new mechanisms feel, as it were, the impact of each on the other, and of new discoveries in still other technologies. A full review of the evidence that we are in an adaptive civilization could overwhelm us if we did not possess the very strengths I tell you you have - the freedom to devise new services, to experiment, and to change. Why should you look at each other in consternation and self-doubt?

You have the very quality the times call for - adaptability. What if you cannot be immensely big? You can be imaginative, sensitive, and agile - all qualities with a greater survival value than bigness alone possesses.

Now if I were to try to define the task for private charities I would begin by asking three questions: what is given, how effectively is it given, and what are the motives of the donor and the emotions of the recipient?

First what are you giving? Is it like a cup of water - valuable and valued but conditional upon your personal generosity? In that case the historic course of events will be repeated: first a cup of water, then a barrel, then free access to your well, then a well maintained by the community, then a proprietary water company, and finally a municipal water system. Clean, fresh water is so valuable. And so it goes with giving anything essential: a gift that later becomes a demand whose cost is shared.

Or do you wish to begin with giving education? The development has been similar. First the parent giving occasional lessons, then the family governess or tutor, then the local school, private or public, and finally the public school system - socialized education.

Or are you thinking of medical care? First the medicine men of primitive cultures, then the private physician of Hippocratic days, then, thanks to Christ's injunction to minister to the sick, the hospital, and then public health and preventive medicine and a growing pressure to have something as good as medical care free to all and paid for by nearly all. The late Lawrence Henderson remarked that

probably between 1910 and 1912 it became possible to say with approximate accuracy that a random patient with a random disease consulting a physician at random stood better than a fifty per cent chance of benefiting from the encounter. This form of statement introduces both time and measurement into the simpler view that medical care has recently become worth betting on and worth having. That is, I think, the most powerful factor in the increasing demand for medical care. And mind you, the demand is far less than the need. The need is as yet unmeasured, but it surely is a vast accumulation.

The major inference I make from seeing the experience of private philanthropic enterprises growing by slow degrees into public services is a simple conclusion: don't expect to retain a monopoly of giving anything that is essential. Our fellow human beings will not care to remain mendicants or postulants or dependents or beneficiaries of our good will in anything that they consider essential. Our greatest service in private charity has been and will be not in the quantity of routine essentials we purvey but in discovering new needs and finding the ways to meet them, and showing that they can be met. That is the task we have, and we should be at it before such needs have reached unmanageable proportions. Unless needs are recognized early, and services to meet them started, explored, and adjusted, the needs grow to such dimensions as to call for political interference from a restless public - the present situation in the distribution of medical care.

Obviously our task then is qualitative not quantitative. And in point of quality American philanthropy has passed through something of a revolution in the past fifty years. In the old days the question

in a donor's mind used to be, "How much can I afford to give?" It has been, I think, the unexpected contribution of the large foundations and the war drives for large funds, that the question of "how much" has been eclipsed by the questions "how sensible is the objective and how efficiently is it being reached?" In the old days the donor took the worthwhileness of the charity for granted, and charitable enterprises worried only as to how much support they would get. It was a new experience for them to be told that their finances were of less importance than the nature of their objectives and the quality of their performances. The essence of the Gunn-Platt report also was that private charitable enterprises need to go in for more reflection and more efficiency - not just more of what they have been doing in the past.

I would hazard the guess that a second revolution in philanthropy may be on the way - a revolution in which the essential activity will be a mature review of the donor-recipient relationship. There has been a good deal of serving God with a cross on one shoulder and a whip on the other. We ought to back off and look at ourselves and wonder why it is that hell hath no fury like a spurned philanthropist. Both of those difficulties occur when the donor-recipient situation has had insufficient attention.

But before attempting to outline some considerations that bear upon the relationships between givers and receivers, let me call attention to one queer aspect of welfare work of all kinds. It is the startling contrast between the energy and skill that go into raising funds and the absence of energy and skill with which those who have

supported our efforts are ever reminded or even informed of what their gifts have accomplished. There are actually organizations that specialize in raising money: there are none to show charities how to be grateful to their supporters. Annual reports aren't enough. There is a constant effort to make appeals for money personal appeals: what the situation needs is personal and, if possible, spontaneous letters of thanks - personal and long after the event.

Now I come to a part of the task before private enterprises that might logically have been put first in this talk. But I have put it last in the hope that it may the better sink in, and, I may as well confess, because I am less sure of its acceptability as yet. But some day we shall have to examine our motives in giving money and services to others, and, at the same time, we would do well to pay attention to the other side of the charity equation - the sentiments on the receiving end.

Philanthropic work implies giving on a somewhat impersonal basis. At least we would hardly call Christmas and birthday presents philanthropy. So we may exclude that kind of gift from the analysis of the motives for giving. What may the motive for giving be?

1. We may give to make friends, to draw a crowd, to impress people favorably. This is not unheard of in political and commercial life. It is received with anything from guarded politeness to cynical suspicion. That is not a satisfactory relationship between donor and recipient.

2. We may give to obtain control over the conduct of others. This form of giving, since it is never complimentary and occasionally infuriating, tends to be rather nervous and self-conscious and seeks for

some pretext that will deceive the recipient. To do this kind of giving it is usually found convenient to employ people with a natural tendency to deceive themselves since the more blunt and honest agents are likely to get into hot water for their lack of what is called "tact." Receivers of this kind of giving show sentiments that range from resignation, through reserve and reluctance, to outraged resentment. That does not create a sound relationship.

3. People occasionally are forced to give out of fear of being robbed as the alternative. The potential robbers exhibit nonchalance or a sadistic vindictiveness that usually calls for more from the donor. And that is hardly a satisfactory situation.

4. We may give to avoid taxation. To the extent that this takes place the recipient organizations might be considered as supported by government. This motive is not always evident. Indeed, I am told that the average American income tax return shows deductions for charitable purposes that are nearer 2 per cent than the 15 per cent allowed by the tax form. The rather pathetic characteristic of giving to avoid taxation is that it suggests that giving and being taxed are the same thing and thus hastens the growth of submission to, and the dependence on, government for all forms of education and welfare work, or an equally sterile attitude of refusing to cooperate with the government in any way whatever. There is plenty of current evidence that this situation is not sound.

5. Giving money may be inspired by the desire to avoid knowing the recipients. It may be less of an annoyance to share money with the poor than to share an intimate knowledge of what being poor is like.

This kind of giving is usually received in silence. I wish the "ch" in charity were pronounced as the "ch" in Chicago. Then we would pronounce it sharity, and then we could learn to share as well as care.

Giving may help the giver to attain or retain distinction or status in society. That kind of giving reminds me of Veblen's phrase, "conspicuous waste." It is usually accompanied by the expectation of gratitude. So important is the glory and distinction to be obtained that givers of this kind like to regard their pet charity as a personal monopoly. Perhaps we should rejoice that ours is a civilization that accords distinction to a giver, but our times are not unique in this distinction. There have been patrons from the days of Maecenas to the day when Señora Perón decided to send clothing to 600 poor children in the capital of another country.

7. Money can be given as penance out of a sense of guilt or in expiation. This type of giving is often recognized for what it is - a kind of corrective or catharsis of the donor's emotional life. It is usually received, therefore, with cheerful enthusiasm and no sense of obligation or partnership whatsoever.

8. People may give out of elemental pity and compassion. This may be giving from abundance, but almost as commonly the relatively poor give to each other in what I have called "sharity." Doctors see a great deal of this among their poorer patients. This kind of giving is more likely to humble an onlooker than to humiliate the recipient. In my experience there are few more heartening aspects of humble people than their compassionate generosity to each other.

9. Then there is giving in mere gratitude for being alive. Whether as a thank offering for being spared from disaster or cured of

an illness or out of cheerful exuberance and abundance this too is rather a heartening kind of motive. It is usually received with incredulous anxiety as to how long the motive will endure. And rightly so since moments of expansive good will toward men make us but short visits at best.

10. And now for the kind of giving that is perhaps best balanced as between giver and receiver. This is where both agree that there is something to be done, some need to be met, something to be stopped, or changed, or something to be created. The giver of money or of effort can in this way contribute his share and the receiver his. Indeed giver and receiver fuse their identities in a common effort, and each respects the other and depends upon him. The generosity of the giver of money is matched by the generosity of the receiver in point of enthusiasm and hard work.

These ten motives for giving I have reviewed because the task for private charity today must begin with long reflection upon the relationships between those who give and those who receive. If we do not admire ourselves too tenderly for giving we shall not resent it too bitterly if government takes over the best things we have done. It is our glory to have found and started them. We are faced with the temptation to pity ourselves when services we have shown to be valuable are demanded by the taxpayers as essentials. But private charity will not cease. It offers too close a communion with what fine people will always insist on enjoying, especially the warm hearted who have clear heads and see what the new needs are. Against ignorance or embittered self-pity or deadening routine our private agencies will match their peculiar strengths - S. E. C. -

starting, experimenting and changing. We must seek quality, not bigness. We must be prepared to answer criticism of the present value of our established objectives, as well as the efficiency of our performance. And, most searching test of all, we must reflect upon our motives and the human relationships these motives produce.

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